

Kimberly Kick's Testimony before Public Safety Committee February 16<sup>h</sup>, 2017

In support [763](#) (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING WORKERS' COMPENSATION COVERAGE FOR POLICE OFFICERS, FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL TECHNICIANS WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER.

My husband and I were college sweet hearts. When we met, I was pursuing a degree in Education and my husband one in Criminal Justice. From the time, he was a little boy, Chris knew he wanted to become a Police officer and when things became serious we had the discussions that many people have prior to becoming engaged; about how it was going to be, how I would handle it, and what that would mean for our life. When you love someone, you support your dreams and passions, and that is what we did. We married in 1998 and when we returned from our honeymoon we found a letter in the mailbox congratulating him on becoming the newest member of the CSP's 108th training class. It was with mixed emotions that I sent him off, as newlyweds, to the Police Academy. I longed for graduation day, so that we could begin our married life, and when it finally came, our extended family was overwhelmed by the beautiful ceremony and the speeches which included a lot of talk about how now, we were all members of a State Police Family...a brotherhood and sisterhood like none other.

The first few years that followed were full of challenges. Crazy schedules, missed holidays, birthdays, long hours, mandated overtime, etc., but Chris was happy and excited. He was placed at one of the busiest Troops in the state, Troop G, and made friends, went out there day in and day out, like so many of these people do, trying to make a difference. He always wanted to be a first responder; never wanted to sit behind a desk. Over the years, the job took its toll on the family. The schedules and crazy hours were not quite as exciting. The constant exposure to accidents, suicides, and family tragedies weighed on him but he continued to remain faithful to his duties. Three Troop assignments later, he found himself at Troop A in Southbury. He was finally on day shift, which suited our family a bit better. Our children, Christopher and Olivia, now aged 17 and 14 respectively, were in elementary school and middle school at the time. They were not as thrilled with Chris's schedule as it often meant that he was missing from school and family events, and they spent several Christmas's bringing breakfast to the Troop so that they could share Christmas morning with their dad.

Chris would come home at night and often would "check out" of the family activities. He had to be hypervigilant all day long that by the time he got home, he had to shut himself off, withdrawing from the family somewhat so that he could recharge. It would cause anger and frustration in our marriage, but I was still hopeful that it would all be worth it in the end and that eventually he would be one of the lucky Troopers to get a 5 and 2 schedule so that he could spend weekends with us.

On December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the kids were at school and I was doing errands for my business when I heard on the radio that there had been some type of a shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary

School in Newtown. I shook my head and immediately called him, knowing that if there was a shooting anywhere he would be there and I knew that he was typically in that area. Of course, he did not answer, so I left him a message to please simply call me to let me know he was alright when he was finished. The next call I received was not until after 11:30am and it sent chills throughout my body. I was at a bank drive-through window and he quickly phoned me to let me know that he was alright. I could hear the adrenalin in his voice, it was a bit shaky and that is not something I was used to hearing. All he said was that it was bad and that there were many dead and I had no idea how that could be the case. I didn't get many details on that brief call but when I arrived at work, a private preschool our family owns in Orange, I immediately put on the news and texts and calls began to come in from family asking me about Chris and where he was. I kept telling everyone that he was there and there were rumors that it was a massacre.

What unfolded after the next several hours, days, months and years has been a nightmare from which our family, like so many, have yet to recover from. My husband was outside the school with fellow officers when they heard the final shot which was the killer ending his life. He was with the first officers to enter the school that day not knowing if there was still an armed man inside. He happened to be working the desk at Troop A when the call came in of a shooting at Sandy Hook. He immediately, without being asked, jumped out of his seat, had someone cover his post, got in his vehicle and rushed to the scene. His car is the one you see parked in front of the building during all the television and news coverage. Seeing bodies on the floor inside the school, he went in through the front window and came upon a scene that most people would run away from. He cleared classrooms, and found the room with the mangled children and brought the injured Natalie Hammond in his car to an ambulance. He returned to assist his Sergeant, who was carrying a child with bullet wounds to medical attention. This child did not survive the wounds that were suffered. Chris was then placed in the fire house, with other Troopers who had just seen and experienced the worst thing they could possibly imagine. In what seems like a cruel joke he was placed in a room full of parents about to have their lives torn apart and was told not to say anything. The entire time being shown pictures and asked questions about children he knew were gone. He knew where their children were and what had happened to them, but could not say. To this day, he still recalls that as one of his worst memories. Having to look at the faces of the parents, whose lives were about to be torn apart and not being able to do a damn thing about it.

We received a call from the Union, on Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> when President Obama came to town. They were going down the list and calling the first responders involved. When I took the call, I was watching the television to see if I could catch a glimpse of my husband at the prayer ceremony for families and first responders, but I didn't catch him. That's because he wasn't in there. He was standing in the rain, in the driveway of the HS guarding the President's detail. The next weeks were full of work, overtime to cover funerals and press that was in town. He had one day off, the day after the event, but after that it was business as usual. It wasn't until January, after things had died down, that our family had begun to see the worst of the affects.

Chris had nightmares. He was often seemingly disoriented at home, which I now know is called “disassociation.” He would be watching a television program with us and something would trigger a reaction that was nothing like we had ever seen. He would get up from a sleep, grab his keys and proceed to his cruiser to try to respond to “calls” that were occurring in his dreams. He became angry, irritable, distant. He was worried, about everything. He would sit in his police cruiser, at the children’s schools on his days off, to make sure they were safe. He’d get up a million times a night to check on the kids and often would comment on how when he would go into our daughter’s room and she was sleeping on her stomach with her hair strewn around her, that he’d have to touch her to see if she was alive. He would point out that if something were to happen in her school, she would be the first to be targeted because she was tall, blond and had the most curly, long hair that would surely be noticed.

Nothing was enjoyable anymore. He would work extra to make sure he wasn’t home with his thoughts. He would try harder to be the first responder to “make up” for the day where they didn’t get there fast enough. He didn’t want to go anywhere outside the home unless he had to, and when he was home alone, while we were at work and school, the couch or his bed was his best comfort. We sought counseling together in January 2013 and to this day we still attend. At the time, the way I could get him to go was if we went together. People ask me what was done to help us and my answer is NOTHING. Initially they had someone from the EAP that we could call, but it was not anything of any help. The CSP did just about NOTHING to help us through this time. The Troopers were not checked out medically, they were not sent to any type of counseling. The families were not reached out to, by anyone to see how things were going. Chris maintained his same position and drove the same patrols in Newtown, day in and day out. When Chris would call out of work in-order-to avoid mandated “school shooting” training, he had to write a memo explaining himself. When he began to call out of work more and more and more, nothing was done or said.

It got to the point where things were so bad at home and he was calling out so much that I called and spoke to a Sgt. friend of ours asking when they were going to come for him. My house was in shambles, our relationship was in shambles, the kids didn’t go to their dad for anything. We’d try to take family vacations and they would turn out to be a disaster because he didn’t like to be in new places. In August 2015, he figured out, on his own, that he needed to take himself off the road. He phoned his Troop and told them that he couldn’t do it anymore. They said they understood. This was the first time I had any contact with the department. Kathy Henry from the STOPS program called and said they had been watching Chris for a long time and that he was their “last holdout.” I had no idea what that meant. Last holdout? I bluntly asked her why we hadn’t heard from them until almost three years later. Why did it take a near breakdown for this to happen? Why was he not moved, cared for, checked up on? She told me that it is difficult and they can’t mandate anything and that Troopers don’t like help. I told her that our family had been struggling for the last three years and I was not pleased that our entire family was now in shambles and that we have had to find all our help on our own. She assured me that she would find a place for Chris, off the road.

By December of 2015, near the third anniversary, Chris was not reachable. He was using alcohol to medicate himself, was sleeping all the time, was still calling out, and I, the kids and our therapists feared for his life. I had a discussion with a friend of ours who was a Sergeant on the department and he said he may just phone Troy Anderson at the STOPS program and mention it to him. Days after, on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, I was phoned from the department to come to meet them at Headquarters. This is where they told me that they had a place for him. They were going to take care of it and it would not be punitive and that it would help with all our struggles. They gave us two places to choose from but stressed that there would be no cost if we selected the option in Pennsylvania. They said they use these places all the time and that he would have the best care and that it would help with the trauma, etc. They said they had a place for first responders within the facility and that he would have to be away for 30 days. No one explained to me that this place they were sending him was simply a rehab facility. This was the first Christmas that Chris had off with the family and it was absolutely obliterated. He left after New Year's Day for the facility. The STOPS program was going to arrange a ride because they didn't want me to bring him due to the traumatic nature of it, but they failed to come through. On the day of his departure, I was accompanied by Chris's brother, and we drove 3.5 hours away to Pennsylvania where he was whisked away for tests and we waited in a room with the general population coming in and out of the facility high on all types of substances. There was a volunteer woman in the waiting area, who had lost her son to addiction, handing me tissues as we sat there for hours. When admission was finished, we were rushed out and had very little communication with Chris during the weeks. I took the entire month off from work to collect myself and care for our children. I drove back and forth to this facility 10 times over the course of the month for visitation. The family counseling that was supposed to take place, never did. And when I finally met with the counselor at the end of the stay, he told me that he wasn't even sure if Chris had PTSD. WHAT?? He had already been diagnosed by two trauma specialists with PTSD. There was no communication with Chris's treatment team in Connecticut over the entire stay and essentially the State Police's solution to this problem was to treat the result of the trauma, which in this case was self-medication, rather than to treat the cause.

When Chris returned from the facility, he had to get his belongings together and had to report back to headquarters where he waited over three weeks to find out his fate. They required him to take a Fitness for Duty test with a Dr. Randall, who ultimately cleared him for duty and they stuck him back on the road at the busiest Troop in the state. No desk job, no regular schedule, nothing that was going to be conducive to his continued care and treatment. Chris worked there diligently and without any incidents, being praised by his LT and co-workers, until December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Another anniversary and another set-back, just as we had feared. His psychiatrist and treatment team took him off the job on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2016 and he has remained home, seeking out-patient treatment for PTSD, anxiety and co-existing disorders since that day and we have been fighting with the state ever since. A 30-day sick bank leave

has been granted which takes us through February 18<sup>th</sup> and after that, we do not know what will happen.

His treatment team wants Chris to remain off the job until further notice, and the state says he must come back or he won't be paid. We've been sent two letters from the state, of a punitive nature, demanding that he seek treatment in an in-patient facility for alcohol addiction, continue marriage counseling, regular counseling, attend AA meetings, etc. I don't need to tell anyone that this is not helpful. We have had to hire an attorney at our own expense. We have no idea when they will stop paying him, and they are advising him to do the exact opposite of what his treatment team is recommending. We have no recourse with the state as we have been advised that we will have to "ask permission" to sue them for this treatment.

Why do I have to remind everyone that our situation was the cause of an injury that Chris experienced on the job while doing things that regular human beings would never have the courage to do? The state had the opportunity, the obligation and the resources to take care of my husband and our family but have shown no interest in doing so. Why is it that the State Police and the State of Connecticut does not want to take care of their heroes? Why is it that my husband, who is a highly decorated Trooper, on the job for nineteen years, is being punished for something that they cannot control? Why do I have to explain to my children that their father is not who he used to be and that we all must seek counseling at different times and days of the week to get through this ordeal. That sometimes Mommy is not going to be able to accomplish all that is required that they must miss out on things and assist in ways that teenagers should not ordinarily have to assist in. Why is it that we have had armed Troopers at our doorstep, two times, unannounced, in-order-to take my husband's belongings because he is now sick? It is unfathomable as to why this could not be handled appropriately. Where is the help? There has been no compassion by the CSP whatsoever and I cannot go on without speaking of it any longer. We are not the only ones affected. There have been marriages that have ended and families broken up over this very same situation. There has been addiction, domestic violence and arrests made by the department which many of these Troopers serve. Where is the "family" that we were promised back in 1998? I do not feel that the public has any idea what has been going on here and it is about time that they do. We have four to five professionals on his treatment team and an entire family, extended family and countless friends both on and off the department who feel the same way. I beg and plead with you all to consider this bill. Please picture my family and the countless others who have gone through this atrocity when you vote. My almost 17-year-old son wanted nothing but to follow in his father's footsteps for a career. I will be damned if I'm going to lose another member of my family to a system that cares so little for their lives. Thank you for listening.

